South Carolina Department of
Natural Resources

John E. Frampton
Director
Robert H. Boyles
Deputy Director for
Marine Resources

3 August, 2009

Mr. Duane Harris
Chairman
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201
North Charleston, SC 29405

Dear ~~Mr. Harris~~ Duane,

Several weeks ago representatives of South Carolina's recreational fishing community brought to our attention concerns over commercial snapper-grouper fishing vessels allegedly operating on several of our permitted offshore artificial reef sites. Specifically, these recreational constituents felt that the use of conventional spearguns by these fishermen to harvest fish on these sites might be harmful to the reef fish populations and was not in keeping with the intended purpose of these manmade reefs.

As you are aware, the majority of South Carolina's permitted offshore artificial reefs have already been designated through past Council actions (per Management Measure #17 of the Snapper-Grouper Management Plan) as Special Management Zones (SMZ), the intent of which is to protect these relatively small reef communities from the effects of overly-efficient fishing practices. For this reason the use of certain types of fishing gear (e.g., bangsticks) within the boundaries of these SMZ reefs has been prohibited for a number of years.

The SC Artificial Reef program is supported almost entirely by the recreational community through the SC Saltwater Recreational Fishing License program and the Federal Aid in Sportfish Restoration program. After a good deal of research it has become apparent to SCDNR staff that a key issue in our recent discussions revolves around a few commercial fishermen who may be legally taking commercially allowable quantities of snapper-grouper species from the state's SMZ reefs. We believe that this practice is not compatible with the purpose for which these sites were established. The Department of Natural Resources is concerned with potential removals of commercially viable quantities of snapper-grouper species from these SMZs, regardless of gear type.

Management Measure #17 of the Snapper Grouper Management Plan allows for a permittee to request the "prohibition" or "restraint" of the use of specific gear types on SMZs. On behalf of the SC Department of Natural Resources, I hereby request that the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council restrict harvest and possession of snapper-grouper species on artificial reefs within Special Management Zones off the South Carolina coast to the recreational bag limit for all recreational, for-hire, and commercial users. Such a measure would not impose a restriction based on intent of

harvesting fish (commercial or recreational) nor on gear type, but rather would impose an easily determined restraint on legal use of gear that is more compatible with the intent for establishing and maintaining these valuable offshore fishing sites.

Thank you in advance for the Council's consideration of this request. Please contact me if I can provide any additional detail or answer any questions related to this request.

Sincerely,

Robert H. Boyles, Jr.
DNR Deputy Director for Marine Resources

cc: Mac Currin, Chairman, Snapper-Grouper Committee
David Cupka
Tom Swatzel
Mel Bell
Bob Martore